

Woodchurch Leisure Centre

Central to Our Community



A report into the merits of Woodchurch Leisure Centre and reasons not to close the centre as outlined in the Strategic Asset Review.

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User Groups of Woodchurch Leisure Centre

Numerous Woodchurch Residents

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1. Introduction

Woodchurch Estate, situated in the centre of the Wirral Peninsula is the largest council housing estate on the Wirral and the second largest on Merseyside. It houses around 11,000 people of whom many have low incomes, 32% of the working age population is workless. (Compared to an overall Wirral statistic of 21.3%). There are a high proportion of single parents and the elderly. The area's reputation for drug and social problems has improved in recent years, although the conditions that could see a return of those problems persist. For example Woodchurch was chosen as an area to benefit from Neighbourhood Management because it includes five full Super Output Areas (SOAs) and of these one is in the top three per cent in the country for levels of multiple deprivation, one is in the top five per cent and the other three are in the top ten per cent. The Leisure Centre plays an important part in the various initiatives to improve the social and health aspects of the area.

Woodchurch Leisure Centre, which lies within the Woodchurch Estate, close to the M53 Motorway, serves many other areas including 2 further large council housing estates, namely Noctorum and Beechwood; and it's geographical location gives the Centre the advantage that it is easily accessible from all parts of the peninsula. It was built in 1967 and the pool area was refurbished almost to the point of rebuilding in the mid 90's, re-opening in 1996. In recent years and to date, following an energy efficiency plan, further improvements have been made, including a new air handling unit, boilers, chemical dose system, new electrical wiring, new pool covers, energy efficient lighting and water saving devices for toilets, sinks and showers. (At a total cost of 500,000 pounds.)

In addition to the pool, the Centre's facilities include a theatre, a large practice hall, various rooms used by Social Services, Wirral Drug and Alcohol Services and the Fender Youth Club. Outside there are four grass football pitches used by local teams, a disused athletics track and a disused porous pitch/athletics arena. The Centre also has good free car parking facilities.

2. Usage of Woodchurch Leisure Centre

In total, almost half a million people have used the Leisure Centre in the last year in support of Council-run activities aiming to provide the Community with a source of healthy activity, the various Sports and Leisure Clubs that hire the facilities and the Social and Youth Services that are vital to the maintenance of Woodchurch as a coherent community with a minimized level of antisocial behaviour.

2.1 Council-run Activities

Swimming

In addition to its role in providing the local community with leisure swimming facilities, the pool at Woodchurch Leisure Centre is currently used weekly by 450 children on school lessons in compliance with National Curriculum requirements and a further 450 on the Council's Learn to Swim programme. Annually, around 2000 children are taught to swim at Woodchurch. Smaller groups receiving lessons are;

- Small fry

- Aquaerobics
- Male only Aquajog for stroke/heart attack victims.
- Disability learn to swim
- Swimming sessions for people with disabilities

The free swims recently initiated for school children and the over 60's as part of the government's drive to increase fitness for these key age groups have also been a resounding success.

Keep fit

Woodchurch Leisure Centre hosts sessions for aerobics, yoga, bums and tums, yogalates and keep fit.

2.2 Activities Central to Woodchurch as a Community

Woodchurch Leisure Centre is used by the following initiatives all of which aim to alleviate the effects of the social deprivation endemic to the area.

Fender Youth Club

The Youth club is run by WBC CYPD and although may be subject to its own cut backs is an integral part of the Leisure centre. The Youth club has over 150 members and provides drop in and educational sessions for young people aged 13 -25. The club is open 4 nights a week. The majority of young people who attend are disadvantaged; all are from the Woodchurch Estate.

The Youth Club has excellent facilities, with a newly installed computer suite, with internet connection, full size snooker table, table tennis, Xbox, Playstation etc. The closure of the club, which has operated for over 30 years will result in young people literally having nowhere to go. The youth club has also been used for Virtual Babies Training, Substance Misuse educational sessions, Halloween parties, Recycling events; Women's keep fit, and other community events.

Neighbourhood Management Team

The Neighbourhood Management Team was appointed to build effective partnerships between residents and agencies working in the Woodchurch area and to maximize the engagement of the community in local decision making. It is in effect a government initiated, Council funded strategy to provide assistance, advice and funding to help the Woodchurch Estate become a nicer place to live. The NMT has had a massive impact on the area and the loss of the centre would mean new premises would need to be found for the next 12 months.

The Social Partnership (Support and guidance for substance misuses and their families)

Drug Rehabilitation and Employment support – direct to the community. The Social Partnership has secured funding and works in partnership with Wirral PCT. It has engaged with 180 clients, all of whom are resident on the Woodchurch Estate. 30 of these clients are now in recovery, 17 are now employed, 19 are in training and 70 have now reduced their substance intake. The Social Partnership also supports families of people with substance misuse. This initiative has been a huge success with the use of sport and educational trips. The removal of this service from the Woodchurch would have a negative impact.

TSP Youth Inclusion Project (Drop in centre)

The Social Partnerships Youth Inclusions Project has a vital role in providing a safe and controlled environment for predominantly young men who have fallen out of society and who are at risk or already engaged in ASB and criminal activity. The Youth Outreach project has engaged with 170+ youths aged 12-25 since February 2008. As well as the drop-in they hold regular diversionary activities such as 1 weekend/month camping, 2-3 Friday night activities/month. The Leisure Centre is also host to monthly alcohol free raves where attendance is 100-150 youths. This programme has achieved many notable successes including providing work placements and opportunities.

The Youth Inclusions Project deals with a wide range of organizations including Merseyside Police, Probation Service, ASBO Team, A.B.C Team, Social Services, Youth Offending Team, Army Careers, Job Centre, Brook Advisory, Connexions, PRIDE. They also engage with a number of local schools.

“Motivate” Job Club

Funded by NMT the job club is held every Wednesday in the Youth Club and encourages attendees to use the NEW computer suite to search for employment. The attendees are 15-30 and are usually long term unemployed.

ReachOut Team

Reachout provide confidential advice to the doorstep of residents in the Woodchurch. They offer advice and support on the day to day issues that people may encounter in the community.

P.R.I.D.E – (Parents, Resources, Information, Drop-in, Enjoyment)

PRIDE started in July 2007 and it meets on a weekly basis. Its aim is to build confidence and self esteem of residents of the Woodchurch Estate and to bridge the gap between young and old, building respect. The group work with many service providers including the police, Heinz, Sainsbury, ASDA, the Zero Centre (domestic violence), Reachout (jobs and mediation), Wirral Met College (vocational courses), Wirral Biz, Neighbourhood Management Team, Social Partnership etc.

PRIDE have arranged courses in Confidence (12weeks), Nail Beauty Holistic Therapy (10 weeks), a Diploma in Computers, Introduction to Psychology, Alcohol Awareness and many more. There is a high demand for PRIDE's vocational courses, many having been repeated. PRIDE also has achieved the largest number of community members attending and finishing vocational courses on the Wirral.

SNAP (Saturday Night Activities Project)

SNAP currently engages with 143 8 to 19 year olds, 70 of those on a weekly basis. SNAP involve these young people into a variety of activities including arts, crafts, cookery and sports. SNAP has 2 football teams which enter into competition.

2.3 Sports and Leisure Clubs

The Leisure Centre is the home of a variety of well-established user groups including the following:

Wirral Judo Club

169 Members, aged 5 - 50

The Judo Club uses Woodchurch Leisure Centre for about 60 hours/month, using 2000sq ft of floor space. The Club has players operating at a high level, having achieved 7 BJA Junior National and 14 British Schools Championship medalists since 2005, as well as 5 medallists at international tournaments and 3 current members of the BJA International Squad. The Club's head coach was voted Merseyside Coach of the Year 2006.

Woodchurch Swimming Club

200 members, aged 5 - 19

The Swimming Club currently trains at Woodchurch 5 hours weekly. This Club has been trying to get more water time for 20 years and has been repeatedly told that the pool is too busy. It has therefore arranged 3 hours of further pool time at Caldys and Leasowe pools. Woodchurch SC has 17 volunteer teachers who are the parents of existing/past swimmers together with a further 8 drawn directly from past and present swimmers, aged mid teens upwards, who wish to add a dimension to their involvement in the sport. The Club has recently been awarded the prestigious Swim 21 Accreditation.

Wirral Metro Swimming Club

Wirral Metro, which relies on the six Wirral swimming clubs including Woodchurch SC as feeders for its membership, uses the pool 2 hours each week.

Panto/drama

100 Players, aged 3-63

Panto Magic host a pantomime each year which is well supported by many local schools and children's organizations as well as by the local community. Rehearsals start in September using the theatre and the practice hall for an average of 20hours weekly until Christmas.

50+

46 Members

Activities include swimming, bowls, darts, snooker, bridge

Karate

30 Members

Wirral Grenadiers

50 members, age 2-35

Wirral Grenadiers is a Majorette dance troupe which has been running at Woodchurch Leisure Centre for 27 years. Training is three times/week for a total of 10 hours and it involves mostly children and parents who are resident on the Estate. The competition season running April to September involves many weekends away.

Wirral Archers

50 Members

Wirral Archers use the theatre 4 hours weekly from September to March for winter practice and for beginners courses. Some of their members compete at County level and it is not practical in this country to get the required practice outdoors through the winter. For this group to find another indoor venue that can provide the range needed for archery would be extremely difficult.

All of these organizations are well supported, well established and will be difficult to re-house. Their loss will have serious social consequences as well as having a deleterious effect on the sporting profile of the area.

3. Consequences of the Planned Closure of the Leisure Centre

3.1 Health

It is a well recognised fact of life that the incidence of childhood obesity, diabetes, asthma, coronary heart disease, stroke and cancer are on the increase in the civilized world. In England this alarming rise is predominantly in the North and perhaps more disturbingly the North West seems to be one of the worst affected regions. Here in Woodchurch we are aware of the National trend and alarmed at the rapid rise of chronic disease in the area; indeed there is growing evidence that the local prevalence of chronic disease far exceeds the national average.

Research shows that obese children are at an increased risk from a number of serious health problems more usually seen in adulthood including hardening of the arteries (CHD), hypertension, diabetes. As these children grow up they are at a higher risk of heart attacks stroke, diabetes and bowel cancer, there are other associated psychological issues associated with childhood obesity raising many intricate social and health problems not only affecting the individual, but increasingly the society they live in.

Quite rightly this government recognized the need to act and introduced a growing number of measures to combat this menace, one of their well publicized target is to bring down childhood obesity by 2010 to 2002 levels, another very applaudable measure was to offer free swimming for patients in the above risk categories. At WLC this has proved to be very popular and patients elderly and young have taken this up with great enthusiasm. One of the major reasons behind this is the proximity and access to the leisure centre because there is a large group of elderly patients living in Flambards, Brackendale and Wesley Grange, who find the services offered at the leisure centre invaluable.

There is a higher than average number of teenage mums/single mums in the area who regularly use the facilities for swimming with their young children which is very therapeutic. Indeed we believe that such facilities have helped, amongst others, to decrease the level of postnatal depression in the area.

It summary it would be fair to say that Woodchurch Leisure centre has played a vital role in improving public health for the community surrounding it and it would be devastating to lose such vital integral facility as it would indeed mean ripping the very heart out of Woodchurch Estate.

3.2 Community

Woodchurch Estate houses around 11,000 people (98.7% White (British/Irish/Other White) of whom many have low incomes. 32% of the working age population is workless, compared to an overall Wirral statistic of 21.3%. There is a high proportion of single parents and the elderly. The area's reputation for drug and social problems has improved in recent years, although the conditions

that could see a return of those problems persist. For example, Woodchurch was chosen as an area to benefit from neighbourhood management because it includes five full Super Output Areas (SOAs) and of these one is in the top three per cent in the country for levels of multiple deprivation, one is in the top five per cent and the other three are in the top ten per cent. The Leisure Centre plays an important part in the various initiatives to improve the social and health aspects of the area.

Educational achievement in the area is poorer than on the Wirral as a whole. A quarter of 25-34 year olds on the estate have no qualifications. This situation is shown by the following statistics.

Educational Attainment in Woodchurch	2005	2006	2007	Wirral (2007)
% of children (aged 4) reaching Foundation Level 6 or higher in Communication, Language and Literacy	51.0%	40.0%	45.7%	57.6%
% of pupils (aged 11) achieving Level 4 or high in English at KS2	76.9%	81.6%	72.2%	81.5%
% of pupils (aged 11) achieving Level 4 or high in Maths at KS2	66.4%	72.4%	78.2%	78.2%
% of pupils (aged 11) achieving Level 4 or high in Science at KS2	79.1%	87.2%	84.3%	88.7%
% of pupils achieving 5 or more GCSEs graded A*-C	44.2%	45.8%	51.7%	62.1%
Average points score at GCSE	294.7	315.7	300.1	370.2
Eligibility for free school meals at primary school	45.5%	46.9%	46.1%	29.3%
Eligibility for free school meals at secondary school	42.4%	43.7%	43.9%	27.6%

Source: Wirral Council, Children and Young People's Department.
Data is taken for pupils who live in Woodchurch regardless of which school in Wirral they attend. The eligibility of pupils for free school meals is taken as a proxy for poverty.

In the last few years there has been an increase in funding to the area which has allowed the various initiatives detailed in Section 2.3 to flourish. Their effect has been profound and some of the successes are also detailed above. It is however their cumulative effect on Antisocial Behaviour in the Woodchurch area that is most impressive and this can be represented simply by the reduction of ASB calls to the police over recent years, which is as follows.

Total ASB calls,	2006	698
	2007	557
	2008	493
Criminal Damage	2007	145
	2008	74

It has also been noted by local police that due to a coordinated effort of youth providers there have been no calls to police concerning youths causing anti social behaviour on Halloween over the past two years. Notoriously one of the worst evenings for youth anti social behaviour in Wirral.

The closure of the Leisure Centre would involve at best the loss of many of these community initiatives because the facility which is integral to their existence would be gone. The consequence of that is likely to be a return to the worst days of drug abuse and antisocial behaviour along with all of the family social consequences that accompany these problems.

3.3 Sports

The Centre houses several well established sports clubs and a number of football teams use the pitches outside. These clubs are run by volunteers and they are instrumental in creating and maintaining the “volunteer culture” that enables such organizations to flourish. For example Woodchurch SC has 17 teachers who are the parents of existing/past swimmers together with a further 8 drawn directly from past and present swimmers, aged mid teens upwards, who wish to add a dimension to their involvement in the sport. Overall the Centre contributes greatly to the sporting profile of the Wirral and through its sports clubs plays a huge part in Child Development, keeping children fit and healthy and giving them a focus that keeps them off the streets. The loss of the Centre would be a blow to both areas.

It is important here to realize that, even if it were possible to re-house these clubs, in most cases the loss of a local home base would lead to a withering of their membership. For example, during the recent 18 month closure of the Oval Sports Centre, Bebington Swimming Club was given generous provision of water time at other pools, including Woodchurch. Nevertheless, in that time they lost 50% of their membership because all of their training was done outside their natural catchment area. It seems unlikely that any other displaced sports club could expect to do better.

3.4 Impact of proposed closures addressing Wirral Council Access Plan 2006

This addresses the comparison of the adverse effects borne by the Woodchurch Estate as opposed the adverse effects borne by the population across all wards of the borough.

The economic impact for Woodchurch for the lower income groups (including the socially excluded) would be to experience greater economic hardship from increased transport costs.

Detriment to community cohesion.
Diminution of economic viability.
Detriment to private and public facilities access.
Exclusion, isolation or separation.

Transport-related exclusion:

- Physical exclusion – based on physical or cognitive barriers.
- Geographical exclusion – based on shortcomings in spatial coverage of transport provision.
- Exclusion from facilities – based on the location and/or nature of the facilities themselves.
- Economic exclusion – based on the cost of transport services.
- Time-based exclusion – based in scheduling conflicts and incompatibilities between the schedules of transport services.
- Fear-based exclusion – based on concerns regarding personal safety and security associated with the use of public transport services.

Environmental justice is the identification of disproportionate adverse effects associated with a policy or scheme affecting minority or low-income populations. If it is shown that a disproportionate impact is likely it should then be determined whether it is acceptable.

4. Conclusions

Woodchurch Leisure Centre sits at the heart of Wirral and caters for various user groups from drug and alcohol rehabilitation, to sports groups and youth services. The proposed relocation of facilities to the edges of the peninsula will leave Woodchurch and surrounding neighbourhoods badly provided for, with serious social consequences arising from the under privileged nature of the area.

Over the years Woodchurch has lost valued facilities including: two full size football pitches, an Athletic track and a Sports Barn – which catered for numerous facilities/activities including roller skating, football leagues, archery, trampolining and many more. If the leisure centre were to close Woodchurch would have NO sporting facilities, whatsoever. Relocation in the vicinity would be impossible because of the various and diverse nature of clubs, the storage of equipment and health and safety aspects. There is no other building, public or private that would cater for their needs. In essence, it would require another purpose built leisure centre.

Woodchurch is the second largest estate on Merseyside, one of the most deprived areas on Wirral and on a national Pathways Programme. The number of Woodchurch households without access to a car is 47.98%, well above the national average of 30%. Transport links are prohibitive in nature around Woodchurch and commercial bus fares cost increased by 9% in 2006 alone. This again would cause excessive hardship to residents and prevent access to key facilities, contrary to Wirral Council's Access Plan 2006.

In a recent satisfaction survey, carried out by *Insite Research and Consulting* on behalf of the Neighborhood Management Team, one of the most commonly cited suggested improvements was to enhance Leisure facilities, echoing findings from previous surveys.

The result of closing Woodchurch Leisure Centre would be higher levels of anti social behaviour, increased health risks and a general loss of wellbeing, which is the direct opposite of Wirral Council's Local Strategic Partnership and Draft Local Area Agreement.

We implore Cabinet members not to close Woodchurch Leisure Centre.

5. Third Party Endorsements

5.1 Rector of Holy Cross Church, Woodchurch – *Rev Ann Davis*

I have been Rector of Holy Cross Church in Woodchurch since July 2003. During that time one of the major recurrent problems on the estate has been of underage drinking and the issues surrounding antisocial behaviour. Particularly during the last couple of years a major focus of neighbourhood renewal funding and of community activity has been towards providing diversionary activities with a marked degree of success, leading to a reduction, both real and perceived, in incidents of anti-social behaviour. There is already a shortage of accessible facilities on the estate; for instance there is no children's play area nearer than Arrowe Park.

With the loss of the leisure centre it is difficult to see how the current level of youth provision could be maintained let alone developed. The provision of facilities elsewhere would not redress this in any significant way; socio-economic factors mean that those most in need are the most unlikely to access facilities off the estate. The question needs to be asked as to whether money saved in the immediate future would be more than offset in the long-term by a resurgence of drug, alcohol and related problems, all of which are a burden not only on individuals, families and communities but on public finance.

Through the neighbourhood management process much work has been done in seeking to encourage and enable the Woodchurch residents to share in responsibility for the well-being of their community; it brings into question the whole process if decisions are then taken over the heads of the community which will clearly have a detrimental effect on the life of the whole community.

5.2 Motivate Youth Project – *Jaine Crompton*

I feel that from my point of view – Having worked with a lot of the agencies on the estate, the big issue is the trust that has been built over the last few years, especially since Neighbourhood management (Council Funding) have been here. There has been a big influx on money on the estate that has provided activities and support for lots of people and started to build the community spirit again. To take the leisure centre is like ripping the heart from the community. I wanted to put something in the report but struggled with getting the right words, I hope from this email you may be able to word it for me?

The young people I deal with feel they do not have a voice, they do not feel they can attend meetings, sit in rooms and get their view point across. These young people are the hoodies that really will be causing the trouble if they leisure centre/Youth Club is removed. Alcohol and drugs are a massive problem and at the moment we are able to offer diversionary activities whilst building relationships and educating them. As mentioned at the meeting two of my young people said they might as well mug old ladies because what they have, what they live for is being taken away – they are not well educated (they are certainly not thick, just never bother going to school), they are not in employment (not because they don't want to work but because there are not the manual jobs out there for them) and they use the youth club as a place to meet, be safe, and hang out with their mates – God help Hoole Road if this mad scheme goes ahead.

The Woodchurch is a deprived area, many of the young people I deal with are not in mainstream school, not in employment or training, many of them have additional learning needs, undiagnosed behavioural issues and family concerns. Many are in the criminal justice system or are subject to acceptable behaviour contracts, don't get me wrong this is my job and the Woodchurch is better than it has ever been but it is better because of all the joined up working and the many facilities available. If we take these away the problems of the past will return.

5.3 SNAP (Saturday Night Activities Project) – *Maureen Kane*

SNAP club has been established since 2005. We started the projects as anti-social behaviour was on the increase as a whole, after listening to community concerns the clubs were founded to combat ASB with diversionary activities. At our clubs we provide our young people with a safe and stimulating environment where they can participate in activities such as table tennis, arts and crafts, basketball, football, cookery, dance and drama and do their home work other activities such as pool snooker darts, Nintendo Wii's and computers.

SNAP provides diversionary activities during school holidays in conjunction with Merseyside Police, Merseyside Fire and Rescue services, The Social Partnership and youth services. Holy Cross has helped to train 15 community representatives to become Boxing coaches to then teach back within the community.

SNAP club was involved with the BLAZE project with Merseyside Fire and Rescue to combat anti-social behaviour towards fire fighters. Four of our young people then went onto complete the Duke of Edinburgh silver awards and then received good citizenship awards for being excellent role models and for their voluntary time given to the clubs. We work with many partners on the Woodchurch including our local Primary and High schools, our elderly neighbours - where our young people tend their gardens. SNAP also hold 'fun days' to raise funds.

The clubs participate in projects such as cleaning up the subways and Hoole Road shops are to numerous to mention. If our community centre was taken away it would be a travesty to our young and older people and their families. Our club would be forced to close and young people may revert back to the anti social behaviour and this would have a huge impact on our community once again.

5.4 Majorette Dance Troupe – *Gaynor Martlew*



WIRRAL GRENADIERS

MAJORETTE DANCE TROUPE

Wirral Grenadiers is a majorette dance troupe, and have been running for twenty seven years, training is three times per week for all teams, a total of ten hours in all, we have always trained on the woodchurch estate in the leisure centre and the tardis.

My name is Gaynor and I have been principle for ten years, I was disgusted to learn that the council are proposing to close down these two centres, and am concerned for the children and youths who will not have anywhere to go or anything to do in their spare time.

The centre is very important for these children and without it the young children of woodchurch will have less opportunity to fulfill their potential.

We currently have fifty dancers and a lot of parents who attend majorettes. I could not imagine how this troupe would be able to continue without the facilities of the woodchurch leisure centre and tardis.

I would like to implore the people involved with this decision to think carefully about the impact that this will have on the young children of Woodchurch and beyond.

Yours sincerely,



(Mrs Gaynor Martlew)

Dr Ivan Camphor

Dr I. A. Camphor MBBS, FRCS, DFFP
Dr T. J. Sims MA, MB, BChir(Camb),
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2nd January 2009

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing to offer my wholehearted support of Woodchurch Leisure Centre, which is at the heart of the local community.

In the news today the government is prepared to spend £75 million in the next 3 years to promote healthy eating and reduce childhood obesity. They predict by 2050 90% of children could be overweight or obese if action is not taken, and this could cost the tax payer 50 billion pounds. Childhood obesity is an area we are tackling enthusiastically and exercise is particularly important in the management of this.

In this area we have a high prevalence of obesity, heart disease and respiratory illness. As part of our weight management we provide passes to our patients to use this excellent facilities free of charge, this has been very successful.

There is a higher than average number of teenage mums/single mums in the area who regularly use the facility for swimming with their young children which is therapeutic indeed we believe that such facilities have helped to decrease the level of post natal depression in the area.

It would be fair to say the Woodchurch Leisure Centre has played a vital role in improving public health for the community surrounding it and would be a devastating to lose such a vital integral facility it would mean ripping the heart out of the Woodchurch Estate.

Yours faithfully

Dr Ivan Camphor
General Practitioner

Dr Tracey Sims

Dr I. A. Camphor MBBS, FRCS, DFFF
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2nd January 2009

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing to offer my wholehearted support of Woodchurch Leisure Centre, a facility with a pivotal role in the local community.

The facilities offered by the leisure centre are essential to the health and wellbeing of the local people. Obesity, heart disease and respiratory illness are of high prevalence in the area. As part of our weight management programme we provide patients with leisure passes to use the leisure facilities free of charge. This has been very successful. Childhood obesity is an area we are tackling enthusiastically and exercise is particularly important in the management of this.

The opportunity to exercise in high calibre, accessible facilities provides benefits even beyond the purely physical as it promotes family and peer group engagement in a positive setting. Isolation and low mood are therefore reduced so enabling social cohesion and a reduction in depression.

Removal of the leisure centre would be ill advised, retrograde step which would certainly be of disadvantage to those living close by.

Yours faithfully

Dr Tracey Sims
General Practitioner

5. 6 Commonfield Road Surgery – Dr C Brodbin

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5 January 2009

**Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council
Town Hall
Brighton Street
WALLASEY
Merseyside**

Dear Sirs

We are writing to register our Practice's concern about the news of the proposed closure of the Woodchurch sports and leisure centre. This is a well valued and appreciated facility used by the people of the Woodchurch and the surrounding areas. It is a valuable resource not only for people's recreation but for promoting health, fitness and general well being. The facility is also a focus within the community and the Woodchurch area would definitely be diminished by its loss.

Currently there is a general drive from central government to raise the profile of health promotion particularly focusing on the escalating prevalence of obesity, especially childhood obesity. It seems strange that as we are to raise the profile of these very sensible health promotion issues, the very facilities that will be needed are being removed.

Yours sincerely



Dr C Brodbin

5.7 Retired Police Officer – James McCosh

I moved to the Wood church Estate when I was eleven that was 44 years ago. The Woodchurch Estate was built to replace the inner city slums and is quite some distance from the town centre and all its facilities.

Being isolated from the town at that time there were numerous problems associated with youths causing annoyance. These problems have been solved to a great extent by the provision of youth clubs and sports facilities.

I joined the Merseyside Police in 1974 and served with them till I retired in 2005. I was for 12 years of my service a Community Beat officer in the North End of Birkenhead. These duties gave me a great insight into the problems caused by youths having no places to go and the terrible price the community pays for such lack of amenities

With growing unemployment and the easy access to drugs these problems are even more serious than ever before. The Woodchurch needs more leisure facilities not less. To remove any of the facilities, risks turning the Woodchurch with its inherited problems into a ghetto.

To remove any facilities is extremely short sighted and will result in causing great financial and emotional suffering to the Woodchurch Community.

James R McCOSH

5.8 Woodchurch Complimentary Therapies Group – Katherine Cooper

Primary Objective is to offer complementary and Holistic therapies which are outside the remit of NHS funded health services. The base model is the Well Blacon Centre in partnership with Blacon NM Pathfinder, Chester.

An application through the NRF discretionary fund with supplemental funding sought from People and Places for consideration of this project was put forward in September 2007. Acceptance came through towards the end of the year; plans were then put in place to initiate this scheme for February 2008. The original statistics meant that 60 people could benefit from this scheme which would work on a voucher system. The voucher system was discarded in Dec 2007 due to difficulties of execution and any stigma that might be attached. The following was implemented as a replacement to the voucher scheme: - appointments were to be monitored by an objective party and any invoicing put through Woodchurch Job Support Officer Maria Owen, with all payments due made through Woodchurch Regeneration Partnership by Christine White.

Problems obtaining a suitable venue were finally addressed during a meeting in the first week of March with the outcome resulting in securing access to a room at the Medical Centre for therapists to carry out various treatments twice a week. These were set as Mon and Friday

working from 10am -6pm, any rent was taken as the equivalent match for the funding provided and in return it was offered that on a Monday the patients of the surgery could partake in benefiting from the treatments available, Fridays were for access from residents, any clients from social partnerships, service providers and patients from other surgeries.

Catherine Cooper is the Project Initiator and manager, handling any issues relating to this pilot scheme and overseen via the Neighbourhood Management Team due to the previous Job Support Officer Maria Owen completing her contract in this area. Invoicing, accounting and funding distribution have been handled via Dave Smith and Christine White of Woodchurch Regeneration Partnership, Woodchurch Methodist Church Pemberton Road.

This scheme has now reached a point whereby more interest is being received from residents, patients, other surgeries throughout nearby wards and other therapists who are qualified and insured wishing to get involved.

A suggestion has been put forward to insert Wirral instead of just Woodchurch Complimentary Therapies to reflect this, which is being considered. This has led to the formation of A.C.T. Alternative Complimentary Therapies which recognises all the therapies and the therapists involved for a membership association at a later stage.

Impact

Brief summary of uptake from residents, GP referrals, social partners, and service providers within the community.

Treatments carried out and appointments booked until project end

15 Treatments carried out from 4th – 10th March 2008

60 Treatments carried out from 10th March 2008

81 Treatments carried out in April 2008 (Easter Holidays – lost 2 days)

75 Treatments projected for May 2008 (Bank Holidays – lost 4 days)

12 Treatments projected for end of scheme June 6th 2008

Total of treatments given 243

Testimonials from social partners, Heatherlands, and resident's feed back forms are being collated as to the benefits for the recipients. Testimonials from participating providers will be attached as and when they become available. All agencies and residents have been asked to include any problems or identify any weakness that have presented during any and all interaction with this project, as this will be invaluable for correcting any teething problems or oversights from an outside service or client perspective.

Meeting of NR floor target

Improved health and social care

Working in conjunction with local social partnerships and service providers to draw attention to the importance of looking after the health across a broad section of age groups on a physical, mental, and emotional level. Through the interaction of the therapies which show as stressed areas within the body's anatomy and reiterating the long term health implication of substance abuse, alcohol misuse, or stress regardless of what circumstances are the root causes. This area of contact between the client and therapist underpins and gives the opportunity to highlight existing services that are relevant to the person's individual circumstances, which means a tailor made package can be formulated and signposting to other agencies implemented. Within

the client's treatment there is usually a physical reaction which helps the client understand his or her body again. Through various factors whether stress, depression, any form of misuse or abuse it has been found that the client has disengaged or overridden the bodily needs. There has been a very positive response to the treatments received from a range of clients who are undergoing health problems ranging from depression, physical illness and people who have been diagnosed with a long term illness which could in some cases be terminal. Furthermore the opportunity presents itself for referral to relevant service providers if there has been no prior uptake of services or a lack of knowledge as to what is available outside of what they are already accessing.

A cross section of issues that have been dealt with during March and April is as follows:-

Substance abuse, alcohol misuse, self harming, domestic violence, bulimia, bereavement, emotional and sexual abuse stemming from childhood and effecting the present, arthritis, spinal problems, diabetes, suicide of daughter, tinnitus, vertigo, gastric, bowel problems and workaholics .

Care givers of;

Physically handicapped children and adults, the elderly, sick dependant, also clients trying to cope with a relative or partner who has some form of addiction.

Other problems that client's have presented with also include:- high stress levels, depression through partnership problems, low self-esteem, apathy, problems with children, work, financial problems, or unemployables because of health condition or low self image.

Better Opportunities for learning

The training of people who wish to learn more about the different therapies they have benefited from will be available to any of the support or social agencies, nurses, or residents who have expressed an interest, including palliative care givers There are currently plans to organise Reiki training provided by an experienced and knowledgeable teacher of a higher standard than is already available for this therapy. Alongside the training modules there is the opportunity for students who would be happy to volunteer their time for more experience for the clients of social partnerships. This would enable a self help group that would benefit the individual, and in return for training volunteer to help others for a minimum set amount of time to earn their qualification. Other therapists who are also qualified for teaching would be willing to engage in a training and education programs for holistic and complimentary therapies. These are people who practise and train because of the benefits of the individual therapy, and not because they have learned a therapy alongside others as a way of increasing their income. Unfortunately this has been found to be the case when looking at some existing workshops and training that is currently available in different areas. Some workshops fall short of a standard that should be expected, this has proven to be the case when students have been asked basic questions and cannot provide the required answer. When assessing one particular training module it was

found to have not addressed relevant areas to the student who then went on to treat members of the general public. This is of real concern to the therapists already involved and those waiting to come on board as education and training can provide real life skills. Benefits of training extend to employability, the individual and their immediate family, and friends.

Thriving Local Economy

These are a few conditions that contribute not only to days off work but also joblessness which these therapies have helped to address and are listed in no particular order:-

Depression
Anxiety attacks
Agoraphobia
Depression
Asthma
Bronchial problems
Domestic violence
Relationship breakdown
Second marriage family issues
Menstrual problems
PCOD
Migraines
IBS, gastric/ bowel problems
Joint pain
Post traumatic stress
Emotional problems
Anger and Stress
Addictions
Post surgery
Muscle injury
Diabetes

The real cost of stress to the UK economy was estimated at over £530 million back in 2006 and is still rising. The estimate for UK business is £14million in lost working days and has risen considerably since the 2006 estimate. When this is broken down across the infrastructure these factors have been compounded to put huge strain on business, especially small companies, existing health services, local economy, the individual, and their families.

The fact that this has been recognised and is now being targeted at ground level throughout the wards of Wirral Borough Council, via the NHS, PCT, Regeneration partnerships and social partnerships can only improve quality of life and well being for those people who liaise with the existing and growing provision of services available. This includes the growing awareness of a proactive and holistic approach to addressing core issues.

People and Places

Within wards targeted under the regeneration programme, areas of poor socio economic problems have been proven to have the highest number of instances of behavioural problems with children and young adults. Some disorders have been linked to pre natal factors such as

substance, addiction, or alcohol misuse, poor nutrition, and education with the ensuing result that children born within these areas suffer from more learning disabilities, and other related conditions. Through the recognition of these problems major programs have been implemented through support and delivery providers. Again a proactive holistic approach adds another dimension for strengthening existing provision, including opportunities for people who have learning disabilities to learn outside academia where they are measured against a national average that reinforces low self image and confidence.

Holistic therapies alleviate stress for family members or carers bringing an added cohesion to the established providers.

Social Inclusion

This project fills in gaps of statute provision and highlights issues of relevance and will not displace any existing groups. This pilot scheme suffered from exclusion of practising within the local community in its primary stages due to the following:-

Lack of knowledge and suspicion concerning a therapy called Reiki which lead to delaying the project because of two different religious community affiliations thought it was some form of faith healing and thereby of a questionable source. This lead to withdrawing the offer of using both their premises.

Overtaxed uptake of community building.

Present restrictions are due to funding and space to meet the increasing demand for these therapies. The local community and existing client base have expressed frustration in trying to access therapies because of the limits over availability and want to see the development and expansion of this initiative.

The Heatherlands Medical Centre have been supportive but cannot offer more than they have already given at this stage, but would gladly give more when able to and other surgeries have expressed an interest in developing this project.

There have been cases of people waiting up to three weeks for a follow up treatment due to time allocations being booked solid. Some of these treatments when dealing with certain conditions need a minimum of three consecutive sessions to get the full benefit which has proved difficult to attain because of current circumstances. Therapists would also be willing to go to client's homes for certain conditions like agoraphobia, anxiety, house bound and palliative conditions etc. This brings to the fore safety issues that are inherent with having to pursue this course of action to enable clients the benefit of extra days other than those allocated as well as funding limitations. Residents and clients who have received treatments are trying to find other suitable premises for this project. There is a real requirement for somewhere that would serve the community's needs for the inclusion of other agencies and any community projects that would encompass education, training, hiring, and accessibility for all groups. This would be part of the development to be put in place for sustainability after some social partnerships or service providers fulfil their contracts within the community in the long term. It is surrounding this issue that the most concern comes from, as the residents are aware and want to fulfil "resident engagement" to its optimum. There is a sense of urgency as understanding grows of the time it will take to continue the initiatives that have already been put in place which have proven the most beneficial.

Summary

Growth and sustainability for this group project has been identified through accessing public and private sector organisations whilst working alongside established community initiatives. There will be an approach to the NHS/ PCT for the inclusion of therapies for the purposes of teaching and practice based on supportive evidence of demand, benefits received to the individual, and the cohesion of support providers